

Dear Friend,

I am currently teaching a series on the Sermon On The Mount. The more I study the gospel as it was taught directly from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ, the more I understand why there seems to be so little power in the churches today. I'm not only talking about supernatural power like opening blind eyes and deaf ears, but also the seeming lack of transformational power to change believers so they live like Jesus instead of like the world.

The gospel has been so watered down in this modern generation, it little resembles the gospel brought to us by Jesus Christ. Remember ... there is no other gospel than the one He brought. Let me make a natural comparison. The chemical components of aspirin were put into the earth by God at creation. Aspirin has many wonderful properties to help mankind. If you dilute aspirin by half, then by half again, and then by half again, and keep repeating that process ... it is still aspirin, but it has been so weakened it has no more effect upon the body. That is what has happened to the gospel in this generation. It has been so watered down by milk-toast, weak kneed, cowardly, people-pleasing preachers that it has almost no transforming power on the majority of the people who hear it.

When the altar calls are given today, they are given in such a manner as to make people think that in order to be saved, it is as easy as simply asking the Lord to forgive you of your sins, and then asking Jesus to come into your heart. Don't misunderstand me. He does forgive you. He does come into your heart if you ask Him to. But let us examine how seriously Jesus teaches about what is truly involved to "enter" the kingdom of God. In order to see what He is teaching in fullness, I am going to bring Luke's account of this same teaching from his gospel as well. Luke brings out some points that Matthew did not, and vice versa.

Mat 7:13 Enter ye at the strait gate

First of all, Jesus uses the word "strait" and not "straight." There is a vast difference between these two words. "Straight" simply means "not crooked." But "strait" means, "pent up, narrow, difficult to be entered." The Greek word G4728 is "stenos" and carries the meaning of it being "narrow from obstacles standing close about." The word "strait" in English is used to describe narrow shipping channels between dangerous rock outcroppings that are always extremely dangerous for ships to pass through. The Greek word implies you have to almost "squeeze" yourself through the "narrow" passageway between rocks on both sides of the path. **The point is ... it takes effort and is not easy!**

Luk 13:24 Strive to enter in at the strait gate

Luke records Jesus using the word "strive." This Greek word is G75 agonizomai *ag-o-nid'-zom-ahee* It literally means "to agonize." It was commonly used by the athletes who agonized in the gymnasiums preparing for the Olympic games. It means "to struggle in agony putting forth all of your powers to gain the prize." Why does Jesus use this word regarding "entering" the kingdom?

In the Sermon On The Mount, Jesus taught that bringing the body into subjection so it would stop sinning would sometimes seem as painful as gouging out the eye and cutting off the hand. BEING SAVED MEANS DYING TO YOUR OLD LIFE AND BEING RESURRECTED TO A WHOLE NEW LIFE. It is death and rebirth.

Entering the kingdom of God does not mean praying a little prayer and then staying the same and

continuing as you were before ... simply having fire insurance against Hell now. IT IS NOT EASY SURRENDERING YOUR LIFE TO ANOTHER. You are no longer going to live according to your own will. You will now live according to the will of your heavenly Father. Notice how plainly Jesus says this in the Sermon On The Mount:

Mat 7:21-23 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. (22) Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? (23) And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Jesus is completely serious about those of us who follow Him no longer walking in darkness. The grace of God gives us the "light of life" that empowers us to "go and sin no more."

Joh 8:12 Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

The GOOD NEWS is ... you are not left on your own to live above sin. The grace of God is ... when you are born again you have "Christ in you, your hope of glory." When you ask Christ to come into your heart ... He does! He literally joins with your spirit in such a way that you become a new creature, a new person. You are literally reborn as a child of God, having the very strength of Christ within you to keep your body from sinning. That's why Paul exhorted believers to:

Eph 6:10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

Your friend and co-laborer,

Gary